Responses to *The Arts in Education* Survey

Summary Report

Manitoba
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RESPONSES TO
THE ARTS IN EDUCATION
SURVEY

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The Arts in Education, Draft Statement, October 2003 and the summary report on responses to the statement are available on the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/arts>.

Responses to The Arts in Education *Survey: Summary Report*

A Survey on *The Arts in Education*

For several months in 2003, a team of arts educators worked with Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth to prepare a position statement on *The Arts in Education.* The draft statement was distributed to education stakeholders in October 2003, along with an invitation to provide feedback on several questions about the proposed direction for curriculum renewal.

More than 200 responses were received from classroom teachers, school administrators, arts specialists, arts education organizations, trustees, parents, and post-secondary faculty. In many cases, school or school division/district staff collaborated to prepare one response that reflected their discussion.

The survey comprised six questions directly related to *The Arts in Education* statement, and provided the opportunity for making additional comments. Respondents were requested to rate their responses on a five-point scale, and provide comments to support their rating.

Responses to *The Arts in Education* statement were overwhelmingly positive. The tables that follow indicate the number who responded, and their rating for each question. (The numbers differ because not all respondents rated every question. In addition, some responded with letters rather than using the survey form.) The following report also includes comments that characterize the written feedback.

Responses to Question 1

The introductory statements in ***The Arts in Education*** *provide a strong rationale for including the arts as part of the school curriculum.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 198	6	5	6	58	123

Among those who responded to the survey on *The Arts in Education* statement, there was general agreement with the Introduction, which focused on the cultural significance of the arts and the role of arts in education. Several respondents indicated the section should be stronger, both to convince school administrators and trustees of the importance of arts programming and to counter the perception of the arts as "add-ons."

Some viewed the arts as transformational: "Many times I have seen 'problem' students' behaviour undergo radical change due to successes in the arts. That transfers over into other academic areas." Others identified the need to put more emphasis on links to research about multiple intelligences and the arts, which provide alternative methods of expression and ways of demonstrating learning. Several indicated that a designation of the arts as "core" curriculum, equal with other academic courses, would assist in countering perceptions of the arts "as too subjective and easy." More than one respondent suggested including a reference to careers related to the arts to help make the case for vibrant arts education programming in schools.

Responses to Question 2

*The essential **Goals of Arts Education**—artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural understanding, and aesthetic valuing—should be reflected in Manitoba's updated curricula for the arts.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 203	2	2	9	40	150

As the following statement illustrates, there was strong agreement with the goals for arts education:

> "These goals [artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural understanding, and aesthetic valuing] are the foundations of arts education. If students leave classes without these abilities, we are not teaching effectively."

One respondent suggested defining "artistic production/creation as centre of curriculum—from which other skills and understandings flow." Others reserved judgement on the goals, indicating a desire to see "examples of goals for lower elementary before giving full support. It is difficult to visualize how goals would be implemented at various levels."

There was also concern from arts specialists regarding the nature of the curriculum goals for their particular discipline:

> "Where do goals of music literacy and skill development in music fit?"

> "Would goals be worded specific to each art?"

Another theme, frequently echoed in responses to questions 2 to 6, stressed the importance of professional learning:

> "Teachers need training, especially to deliver visual arts curriculum. Music is viewed as a speciality, but school officials think anyone who has gone to school can teach visual arts."

A number of respondents focused on Manitoba's diversity, underlining the need to ensure that new arts curricula reflect our history and promote cultural understanding. Several reflected on the arts as particularly relevant for Aboriginal students.

Responses to Question 3

*The **Value of Arts Education** articulates the key role of the arts in learning experiences that engage students intellectually and emotionally. These are principles with which I/we agree.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 203	2	0	4	31	166

Overall, respondents strongly agreed with the points articulated in this section. Those who provided comments, in addition to giving numerical ratings, indicated a variety of perspectives. For example,

> "You need to make more of the arts and community section. Arts help us grow in our concept of community, but also provide the medium through which we experience and practice a healthy community."

> "It is important to continue to clarify these points [arts release the imagination, engage the emotions, involve multiple modes of learning, etc.] so there is greater understanding of the value of learning through arts. It is also important to move beyond the 'feel good' stage of the arts experience and focus on cognitive value. As an arts specialist, I am not interested in providing 'fun' learning experiences for students. I am interested in 'serious fun.' Enjoyment is a natural by-product of serious learning in the art room."

Several commented on the role of the arts in helping students understand their world and experience success:

> "These are principles I try to teach to all students. Many feel inadequate before they start; part way through the course they are thinking, feeling, and understanding new things about themselves and the world they live in."

> "Some students who do not excel in other subjects can best express themselves through the arts. The inclusion of the arts in education is vital not only to these students, but to all students, in order to develop well-rounded individuals."

The reference to the arts developing a critical understanding of the mass media struck a chord with several respondents. As one educator expressed it, "This is a current issue. Students need to become objective and critical thinkers about images they see." Other respondents referred to the need to make linkages between the arts, cultural heritage, and cultural identity.

Finally, one respondent posed the question, "If it is agreed that arts education is valued, is it adequately funded?"

Responses to Question 4

***Constructivist Learning** describes an approach to teaching and learning that should be central to Manitoba's updated curricula for the arts.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 202	1	4	10	42	145

For those who provided written comments, the statement on the constructivist approach generated diametrically opposed viewpoints, as well as some more tentative responses, particularly related to music education. Those in full support offered comments such as the following:

> "Wish the constructivist approach could completely obliterate the transmission model in *all* areas."
>
> "The move to constructivist learning is long overdue."
>
> "For the arts to have real meaning—this is the way it must go."
>
> "Absolutely—this is what should be happening in our music classrooms."

Others expressed a different opinion:

> "Constructivist learning is not and should not be always central, particularly in music education. It depends on what is being done and the age of children involved."
>
> "I simply disagree with the whole premise of a student directing his/her own learning; this is possibly the main thing wrong with education in schools today."

A number of respondents gave qualified support for constructivist teaching/ learning:

> "A lot easier said than done when you look at a broad spectrum of needs in the typical public classroom."
>
> "The teacher as facilitator will need a major professional development focus. Art education tends to be too teacher-centred, with too much emphasis on popcorn products."
>
> "There must not be a 'wide open—go experiment' attitude. Teaching and guided demonstration is necessary."
>
> "I agree with constructivist teaching but am concerned how the approach would be implemented in band, choral, drama, dance where the teacher traditionally has a major role in directing the learning process. Will there be a place for teachers not familiar with the constructivist approach? Professional learning is critical to successful implementation."

The differences in opinion regarding constructivist learning may be attributable to differing understandings of constructivism.

Responses to Question 5

Curriculum Organization *recognizes the importance of* learning in and about the arts *(the curricula identify learning outcomes specific to each of the arts) and* of learning through the arts *(the curricula make connections between the arts disciplines and with other subject areas). This model of organization is one that I/we agree should be addressed in the updated curricula.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 204	1	6	22	55	120

As with written responses to the question related to the constructivist approach, feedback on curricula modelled on both independent and integrated approaches was mixed. Many agreed with the philosophy of integration as "the way children learn best."

> "A strong integrated curriculum is essential to developing strong integrated citizens."
>
> "I strongly agree that this approach is necessary, with integration made explicit and support for teachers built into the curriculum."

For others, integration within the arts and across curricula raised concerns about the integrity of individual arts disciplines and the role of the arts specialists. For example,

> "Integration at Senior Years should be secondary to developing specialized skills. Integration evolves from involvement in the arts, but should not be mandated in curriculum to the point that it weakens individual disciplines."
>
> "We like the overall focus of the document but worry about the specialist viewpoint getting lost in the global picture. Are those teaching in specialist areas (art, music, theatre) able to connect to the bigger picture?"
>
> "I agree [with the approach], provided the new curriculum provides instructional opportunity for one to do so. Do not wish to see this rationale as justification to eliminate music and arts specialists in schools."

In addition to the call for explicit support in the curriculum for "learning across the arts" and "learning through the arts," a common refrain focused on the challenges of making integration a reality:

> "This area presents huge time issues. Teachers are already maxed out. What will they take away to make room for this? We need time in the schedule, time for inservicing, time for collaboration. Doesn't seem a realistic goal."
>
> "Integrated study is easily accomplished at the elementary level. Secondary schools have difficulty because of school structures."

A message that came through clearly was "integration is important, but we want to see an independent focus in curriculum in specific disciplines."

Responses to Question 6

*Overall, **The Arts in Education** statement provides a coherent direction to guide the renewal of arts curricula in Manitoba.*

Number of Responses	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
n = 210	12	6	14	56	122

Of the respondents providing written comments, some indicated *The Arts in Education* statement gives a clear picture of the curriculum focus:

> "The statement is excellent for exposing the multi-faceted orientation of the arts. With some revision, it should provide purposeful direction for revising antiquated curricula."

> "The statement will help to reframe sometimes narrow conceptions of learning held by those who work in education and the general public... thank you for the outstanding effort!"

For others, the statement raised a myriad of questions and a need for details:

> "The overall direction is not clearly stated—many questions remain. What direction, exactly, are we heading in? What does this mean for the classroom teacher? For the specialist? Who will be responsible for what? How will this change current practice?"

> "What will happen to specialists' time? How do we facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration? Do all teachers teach the arts? Will we lose arts education by trying to lump everything together in a cross-curriculum model? Will the integration within the arts and across curricula raise concerns about the integrity of individual arts disciplines and the role of the arts specialists? Manitoba has an excellent system for band, visual arts. Will it be lost?"

> "The statement needs to be followed up with specific activities, inservices and information for teachers. Pretty words aren't art!"

Some indicated that the document does not reflect a broad enough view of the arts. For example, francophone perspectives in Canada and elsewhere in the world are largely ignored: "Where are the references, quotations, inspiration sources representing francophone views on arts education?"

Many responses stressed practical aspects of curriculum renewal, especially related to implementation—for example, the need for teacher training, adequate resources, and a *teacher friendly* curriculum:

> "Artists in the Schools and ArtsSmarts programs are excellent enrichment—but classroom teachers need background and training to ensure art is utilized daily in their classrooms to expand and enrich all curricula."

> "Financial assistance is extremely important for renewing and maintaining fine arts curriculum."

> "Funding for programs becomes an issue for rural schools to access qualified instructors. Has any consideration been given to having a course or courses designated as a graduation requirement?"

Additional Comments

*Please include any additional comments and suggestions regarding **The Arts in Education** statement.*

In many cases, comments in this section summed up points that respondents had raised in previous responses. Several respondents welcomed the prospect of renewed curricula for the arts, and stressed the efficacy of the arts in the school curriculum:

> "The arts are not an extra; they are central to learning of all children…belief, words, actions, money—and evaluate it!"

> "Connecting students to the arts provides a positive stay-in-school incentive. The statement speaks volumes about the value, benefits and richness of arts education."

Several respondents reiterated the need for distinct curricula for each strand of the arts:

> "An excellent generic statement for arts advocacy. I am concerned about the approach in compiling a 'generic' curriculum for all of the disciplines. We must have a detailed, specific curriculum for each 'arts' subject."

Other responses provided recommendations on practical aspects of new curricula for the arts:

> "Make the curriculum a simple document—easy to grasp, with few but important goals per grade. Specific suggested activities are always very helpful, with techniques provided to aid teachers in a discussion of art."

> "The previous curriculum is outdated. Technological graphic design and digital music are critical to meeting students' needs. Need a concise document to explain both learning and teaching of the arts. Please formalize and begin designing curriculum frameworks and courses so teachers can have an improved guide to teach their students."

Thank You

A word of thanks to everyone who completed the survey questionnaire and forwarded responses. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth will use the information gathered through this process as we move forward with curriculum renewal.

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